

INFLUENZA VACCINE UPDATE

Concern over the early start of influenza (flu) activity during the 2003-04 Influenza Season prompted an unusual demand for influenza vaccine in San Antonio/Bexar County, the state, and throughout the nation. This resulted in widespread vaccine shortages in many areas including San Antonio. The San Antonio Metropolitan Health District (SAMHD) has administered over 42,400 doses of flu vaccine and currently maintains a limited supply.

In order to reduce the incidence of influenza-related illness among persons who are at greatest risk of being hospitalized or dying of influenza complications, the SAMHD is administering existing limited supplies to patients who fall within the highest-risk categories. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), the following individuals are considered among the highest-risk categories:

- Persons 65 years of age and older
- Infants 6-23 months of age
- Persons of all ages with chronic underlying medical conditions that place them at greater risk of complications. These include cardiac, pulmonary, renal, diabetes and other immune compromising conditions. (Persons 18 years and older are urged to provide a physician's referral.)
- Women who are pregnant and are in their second or third trimester
- Health care workers and employees of hospitals, clinics, offices, and chronic care institutions who care for persons at high-risk from complications of influenza

Healthy persons and household contacts of highest-risk individuals are encouraged to seek other existing alternatives to protect themselves against the flu such as receiving intranasal flu vaccine (recommended for healthy persons aged 5-49) from their private physician or local pharmacy or antiviral medication from their private physician. Other safeguards should be taken to prevent the spread of influenza such as frequent hand washing, using a tissue when sneezing or coughing, and avoiding contact with persons who show signs of respiratory illness.

Due to the limited supply of influenza vaccine, only highest-risk children under the age of nine years who received a first dose of flu vaccine and need an additional dose will be given the second dose (dependent upon sufficient vaccine supply). Children considered at highest-risk include infants 6-23 months of age and children 24 months through 8 years of age who have a chronic health condition.

Influenza is still active in San Antonio. Persons who fall into a highest-risk category for influenza are highly encouraged to contact their primary care physician for their flu shot or the SAMHD at 207-8790 for more information regarding influenza vaccination clinics and availability. The SAMHD's cost for a flu shot is \$15.00. Patients who have Medicare, Medicaid, CareLink, Community First, or CHIP and present a valid card at the time of the vaccination are eligible to receive a flu shot at no cost.

Pneumococcal vaccinations are also available for \$25.00. Patients who have Medicaid and present a prescription or Medicare will not be charged for their shot. Pneumococcal vaccination is recommended for all persons age 65 years and older and for persons two years of age or older that have a chronic medical condition.

Keep healthy this New Year! Protect yourself and your loved ones against the flu and pneumonia!